



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

November 30, 2017

SMASHED BOWLS & THE BIBLE

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8

An old fortress some 20 miles southwest of the Dead Sea in Israel today has been called "one of the most spectacular finds of recent decades in all Israel." Archaeologists have unearthed the walls of a massive Iron Age fortress, built about 800 B.C., which are some 300 feet on each side and had massive towers on each corner. "OK," you may be thinking, "Why get excited over a pile of very old rocks in a desert?" Good question. And the answer goes deeper than archaeology. It embraces the historical trustworthiness of the Bible at the same time.

Historians got excited when the old fortress was clearly identified as that which belonged to one of ancient Israel's most bitter enemies. Archaeologists got excited when they discovered an old Edomite shrine with some 67 bowls with cultic images on them. Scholars of the Bible got excited because they recall the prophecies of both Isaiah and Obadiah—two prophets of the eighth century who predicted that Edom and its power would be absolutely smashed to pieces. I get excited when I see another instance when the spade of the archaeologist confirms the historical record, reminding us that what is found in this Book is authentic.

Among the ruins at En Hatzeva where the fortress and the cultic shrine are located were found seven large limestone incense altars decorated with human-like figures, places where incense was offered. The artifacts which archaeologists found were all placed in a pit and smashed to pieces, obviously by someone who wanted to destroy them entirely. Imagine their surprise, some 2500 to 2800 years later, if those who stomped them so thoroughly could see them today, reconstructed painstakingly by archaeologists.

Historians are surprised to find something belonging to the Edomites within territory which belonged to the kingdom of Judah. Travelers to the Middle East today identify the rosy red city of Petra as the home of the ancient Edomites, but Petra in



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Jordan today is a long ways from En Hatzeva, which seemingly proves that the Edomites had extended their influence and power far into territory belonging to Israel.

There are many unanswered questions, but we do know two things: First—the very presence of the Edomites was abhorrent to Judah. Edomites had—on at least three occasions—refused to let Israel pass through their territory when they came into the Promised Land. This had never been forgotten. Then, the gods of the Edomites, including their images and deities, were repulsive to Israel. The first of Moses' 10 commandments forbade the worship of any other god, and the second restricted making any images.

How does all this relate to our lives today? 2 Kings 23 tells how King Josiah destroyed the idols of the Sidonians, Ammonites, and Moabites. What archaeologists have found may well be part of that massive cleansing of pagan worship. It also tells us that the prophecies about Edom were fulfilled, literally and precisely. Long ago one of the poets wrote that the wheels of God's justice grind slowly yet they grind exceedingly fine. It's true.

If what archaeologists have found gives you greater confidence as you pick up your Bible and read, then so be it. God's timetable is vastly different from ours, yet what He says—whether it be about individuals, nations, or the world—will eventually take place. With that confidence Isaiah wrote, "Grass dries up, and flowers wither when the LORD's breath blows on them. Yes, people are like grass. Grass dries up, and flowers wither, but the word of our God will last forever" (Isaiah 40:7,8, GWV). Can we learn from the mistakes of bygone generations? I hope so, because if we repeat their failures, there is no hope for our children.

Resource reading: The book of Obadiah (1 chapter in length).